



BRINGING PSYCHOANALYSIS BACK TO ACADEMIA - INTRODUCING THE PSYCHOANALYTICUM WUERZBURG

*Pierre-Carl Link¹ | Alexander Schubmann¹ | Max Walter Kinninger¹

¹ Julius-Maximilians-University Wuerzburg, Faculty of Human Sciences. (*Corresponding Author)

ABSTRACT

For the past years, psychoanalysis in German academia has been in constant decline, leading to a situation where psychoanalytic thinking is virtually non-existent in most curricula. To address this gap in academic teaching at the Julius-Maximilians-University Wuerzburg, the Psychoanalyticum has been established to create a platform for a trans-disciplinary discourse about psychoanalysis, its theory, practise, tradition, and related subjects. In the present article, we introduce this novel model of academic teaching, together with its history, conceptual framework, and future orientation.

KEYWORDS: psychoanalysis, depth psychology, teaching, academia, trans-disciplinary.

Flecteresinequeosuperos, Acherontamovebo. (Virgil, Aeneid VII:312)
If I cannot bend Heaven, I shall move Hell.
(quoted by Freud, 1900/1972)

Across all schools and directions in the social sciences, psychoanalysis is to be considered as one of the most ground-breaking and influential, shaping our understanding of the human mind and behaviour from the *belle époque* up to the present day. Hence, many eminent scholars and practitioners in both psychotherapeutic theory and application after Freud and his Viennese colleagues have been dealing with psychoanalytic concepts and ideas, some with the utmost admiration, others with rigid opposition, but always with reference to the psychoanalytic paradigm promoted by Sigmund Freud (Eagle 2011, 3-5). Throughout this process of reception, evaluation, criticism, and development, various different schools of thought can be regarded as 'children' of psychoanalysis, ranging from the earliest chasm between Freud and Jung, over psychoanalysts by training who developed their own, nowadays dominant psychotherapeutic treatments, to contemporary research in developmental, social, and neuro-psychology.

From the very start of psychoanalysis, Germany in particular has taken an ambivalent position towards this subject (for the following, see Ermann 2012, 12-22): in the 1930s and 40s, the disgraceful and abominable denunciation as "Jewish science", in conjunction with subsequent occupational bans and harassments have forced the majority of psychoanalysts in German-speaking and occupied nations to emigrate, with Freud himself moving to his exile in London in 1938. Due to this very diaspora psychoanalysis has been urged into by the ideology of the Third Reich, various approaches have been advanced outside Germany, on different continents and in different languages, most notably in North and South America, France, Great Britain, and Switzerland. Later on, efforts have been undertaken to re-invigorate the sparse field left to psychoanalysis in Germany, leading to notable developments by psychoanalysts such as Alexander Mitscherlich or Horst Eberhard Richter, opponents against the Nazi regime. Henceforth, processing and providing a framework for understanding the darkest chapter of German history has been regarded as one of the foremost aims of psychoanalysis in the years after the war. Subsequently, psychoanalysis again gained momentum during the 68's revolution led by German students and intellectuals, acknowledging the social and political potential of psychoanalytic thought. However, after flourishing for nearly two decades, psychoanalysis went into decline, facing challenges from scientific theorists and empirical research doubting its scientific status and psychotherapeutic value.

Presently, after celebrating the centenary anniversary of Freud's "Interpretation of Dreams" in the 2000s and novel approaches combining modern neuroscience with Freudian ideas about the biological underpinnings of the human mind, a 21st century renaissance of psychoanalysis and its 'children' appears to come into being (Kaplan-Solms&Solms 2005; Starobinski, Grubrich-Simitis, & Solms 2000). This recent development notwithstanding, psychoanalysis is hardly to be discovered in German academia. At many departments and faculties in the social sciences, teaching and research in psychoanalysis and its related tradition has no relevance at all, stupendously ignoring its influence and development throughout the 20th and 21st century. In Germany, much of the current academic landscape occupied with unravelling the mysteries of the human being do not consider psychoanalytic paradigms and methods which could provide novel and unconventional frameworks, diversifying established approaches in psychology, psychiatry, education, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology.

At the department of psychology of the Julius-Maximilian-University of Wuerzburg, the main area of interest consists of empirical work in experimental cognitive and biological psychology, mirrored by cognitive-behavioural psychotherapy (CBT) being presently the predominant therapeutic school. The current situation is not solely to be found in Wuerzburg but paralleled by similar constellations throughout Germany as a default setting of academic psychology. Considering the paradigmatic struggle for limited resources at public institutions, psychoanalysis, quite naturally, has been consequently falling behind. In Wuerzburg, the *Psychoanalyticum* has been trying to change this situation for over two years by enriching the academic culture with contributions from psychoanalysis in a novel and independent format.

In its present form, the Wuerzburgian *Psychoanalyticum* invites students and other interested members of the community to attend a series of lectures, consisting of five to seven sessions per term. These take place at the Department of Psychology at the Julius-Maximilians-University Wuerzburg. In reminiscence of Sigmund Freud and his 'Wednesday Psychological Society', the event is set on this very day every other week to learn about psychoanalysis, its theory, application, and influence in an hour-long lecture. Directly afterwards, participants are encouraged to engage in a critical discussion about the presented matter to prevent the teaching *ex cathedra* practised by regular academic lectures and talks. Despite the *Psychoanalyticum* being conducted at the psychological department, a diverse academic auditory is considered of utmost importance in order to develop a fruitful and lively atmosphere for psychoanalysis to re-emerge at university. Accordingly, students of psychology, medicine, sociology, education, special education, and philosophy are addressed to take a view at psychoanalysis from their perspective.

This is one manifest symptom of the authors' very aim of *trans-disciplinary thinking*, which serves as the wider conceptual framework for our academic undertaking. By this, it is meant that current disciplines dealing with the human being should be re-integrated to create a holistic methodological approach for complex human phenomena. The authors certainly neither advocate for psychoanalysis to return to German academia as the unique and superior way of accessing the human mind, nor do they regard themselves as dogmatic epigones of Freud constructing a narcissistic image of the unrecognised scientist. However, the strong opinion is held that psychoanalysis is worth re-establishing in the German academic curriculum: firstly for the obvious reason that it offers a different perspective necessary to at least grasp some of the fundamental aspects to the human being conjoined with other current paradigms of the social and structural sciences. Secondly, psychoanalytic discourse can function as a forum for a discourse between various sciences since it has influenced thinking in many of those, ranging from philosophy to religious studies or even neuroscience. Correspondingly, we attempt to incorporate this notion of trans-disciplinarily methodology and invite scholars and practitioners from various fields to deliver our *Psychoanalyticum* lectures, which have so far attracted between 50 and 100 people to come to university on a Wednesday evening. Additionally, the *Psychoanalyticum* tries to embrace the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of psychoanalysis in order to lay ground for further critical development of psychoanalytic theory (Schöpf 2014).

However, the initial *Psychoanalyticum* started as an autonomous 'Introduction to Psychoanalysis' in summer 2014, with seven lectures entirely delivered by the authors. During a continuous and still ongoing process towards academic professionalization, reputable experts have been invited to offer psychoanalytic teaching of the highest quality possible. Subsequently, eminent scholars such as, for instance, Hermann Lang have followed the invitation. Due

to the multi-facetted interest in the social sciences, the *Psychoanalyticum* has been able to cover a wide range of topics, from 'classics' such as Freud, Jung, Adler or Lacan, over specific mental conditions, to psychoanalytical applications to alien fields, such as war or criminal psychology (Elhardt 2015, 165-80). Furthermore, other forms of psychotherapy, whose foundation is derived from psychodynamic perspectives and who are to re-orientate towards psychoanalytic thought, such as Gestalt therapy (Blankertz 2016), are implemented via special lectures. From its very beginning and throughout its course, the *Psychoanalyticum* has increasingly been gaining attention from academic institutions and related, trans-disciplinary educational programmes, notably from the *Philosophicum*. The latter can be seen as the philosophical 'twin' of the *Psychoanalyticum*, by aiming at reinvigorating philosophy and ethics in the curriculum of future German physicians and re-establishing a platform for a discourse between medicine and the humanities at German university hospitals (Bohrer, Link, Schmidt, & Königshausen 2016; Bohrer, Schmidt, Link, Daubt, & Königshausen 2016).

Now, for the term about to commence, the lectures are assembled – for the first time – under one common theme, 'psychoanalysis and sexuality'. Although the danger of confirming prejudices about the sexual reductionism put forward by many against psychoanalysis is taken into account, 'sexuality' is an area of interest virtually non-existent in the majority of Wuerzburgian curricula, or at German universities in general, for that matter. Moreover, psychoanalytic tradition offers many different theories and views on sexuality worth re-visiting and discussing. Therefore, an opportunity for a novel academic involvement in that topic should be created which will certainly benefit from being illuminated intensely from different angles. In a similar vein, the *Psychoanalyticum* tries to benefit from these effects of a common frame so that the lectures to come should circulate around 'psychoanalysis and the Alien', with a special focus on immigration and xenophobia. For this project, the *Psychoanalyticum* is planned to cooperate with the GSiK centre (Global Systems and Intercultural Competence, Wuerzburg) of the Julius-Maximilians-University of Wuerzburg to emphasize the practical value of psychoanalytical thinking from an official side.

To further promote the academic standing of psychoanalysis in Wuerzburg, the authors are currently about to establish a trans-disciplinary fellowship programme for both graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in medicine, social sciences and the humanities, which is to start in winter 2016. More specifically, the fellowship deals with issues in the intersectional field of depth-psychology and education/ special education and is therefore planned to enrich this area from a psychoanalytic perspective (Bernfeld 1925/1970, 72; List, 2009, 288). By fellowship, a general frame is meant within which different teaching forms are offered. Moreover, the participating students do not merely take university courses, but are fundamentally involved in planning the general outline of the programme and details about future series of lectures, such as speakers, term topics, and cooperation with similar events. This teaching project will also include elements eligible for awarding credit points in the established curriculum of special education, education and the Wuerzburgian Graduate School of Humanities. Going beyond the lectures delivered through the *Psychoanalyticum* itself, the fellowship will also contain a seminar 'Psychoanalysis – (Medical) Ethics – Philosophy' open to every interested student. This seminar should serve, on one side, as an opportunity to reflect upon issues put forward during the *Psychoanalyticum*, on the other as a platform where the students themselves should hold short presentations about psychoanalytically related topics. Quite understandably, the nature of this project is rather experimental and does surely not guarantee the prospect of a certain outcome. In turn, the open conceptualisation of the fellowship allows to implement novel ideas and valuable feedback from students' experiences with this way of teaching, an approach we assume to be taken on too few occasions in the current academic system. To ensure the full scientific potential, the fellowship is supported by cooperating partners on a cross-faculty level, ranging from lecturers and researchers in psychology over philosophy to German literature.

In parallel, grant applications will be being prepared for obtaining teaching and research funds from the Julius-Maximilians-University Wuerzburg and the Human Dynamic Centre Wuerzburg, an international, university-based think tank. By virtue of these financial supports, the *Psychoanalyticum* should receive the possibility to invite prominent guest speakers from outside the Frankonian region whose accommodation and talk could be paid for.

So far, the *Psychoanalyticum* can be considered a success story of introducing neglected or almost forgotten topics into the academic establishment. With each step taken, the authors have been surprised by the positive feedback and the remarking demand for "out-dated" or "unscientific" thoughts (Kandel 2012). Consequently, we also expect our most recent advances, first and foremost the fellowship programme, to fall on fertile ground. Nevertheless, we hope to extend the present offer regarding psychoanalytic courses to close a gap still prevalent in the majority of German curricula. We therefore try to get in touch with similar programmes and interest groups and strongly advocate for a close cooperation to combine our efforts in order to enable greater achievements.

To summarise, a novel academic teaching form has been successfully established over the past terms at the Julius-Maximilians-University Wuerzburg: the *Psychoanalyticum*. As a trans-disciplinary series of lectures for psychoanalysis

and beyond, it has been attracting students from different sciences dealing with the human condition. For further professionalization, a fellowship programme is about to be introduced, combining a wide range of academic subjects with psychoanalytic perspectives through a series of lectures plus seminar. With the current article, the authors hope to convey the general outline and their intentions to both interested and critical voices in order to initiate a fruitful discussion about ways of re-implementing psychoanalysis and its successors into academic curricula. So bringing Psychoanalysis back to Academia in Germany? 'The struggle is not yet over' (Pick 2015, 113).

Aims of the *Psychoanalyticum* Wuerzburg:

- Presenting psychoanalysis, its concepts, tradition, successors, and variety in a scientific and practically orientated manner
- Debating common and inconsistent claims both against and within psychoanalysis
- Transcending disciplinary and methodological borders in order to advance a more holistic understanding of human being(s)

REFERENCES:

1. Bernfeld, S. (1925/1970). *Sisyphos oder die Grenzen der Erziehung*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.
2. Blankertz, S. (2016). *Die Geburt der Gestalttherapie aus dem Geiste der Psychoanalyse Sigmund Freuds*. Norderstedt: BoD.
3. Bohrer, T., Link, P.-C., Schmidt, M., & Königshausen, J. (2016). Why should philosophy be reanimated? Changing medical students education, *International Education and Research Journal*, 2, 12-13.
4. Bohrer, T., Schmidt, M., Link, P.-C., Daubt, J., & Königshausen, J.-H. (2016). Die Praxis des Arztes ist konkrete Philosophie - Über die Wiedereinführung des Philosophiums an der Universität Wuerzburg, *Medizinische Welt*, 1, 1-4.
5. Eagle, M. N. (2011). *From Classical to Contemporary Psychoanalysis. A Critique and Integration*. New York, Hove (East Sussex): Routledge.
6. Elhardt, S. (2016): *Tiefenpsychologie. Eine Einführung*. 18th ed., Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
7. Ermann, M. (2012). *Psychoanalyse heute. Entwicklungen seit 1975 und aktuelle Bilanz*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
8. Freud, S. (1900/1972). *Die Traumdeutung*. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer.
9. Kandel, E. (2012). *The Age of Insight: The Question to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain, from Vienna 1900 to the Present*. New York, NY: Random House.
10. Kaplan-Solms, K. & Solms, M. (2005). *Neuro-Psychoanalyse. Eine Einführung mit Fallstudien*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
11. Pick, D. (2015). *Psychoanalysis: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
12. List, E. (2009). *Psychoanalyse*. Wien: facultas.
13. Schöpf, A. (2014). *Philosophische Grundlagen der Psychoanalyse. Eine wissenschaftshistorische und wissenschaftstheoretische Analyse*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
14. Starobinski, J., Grubrich-Simitis, I., & Solms, M. (2000). *Hundert Jahre 'Traumdeutung' von Sigmund Freud*. Freiburg: Fischer.